

"At a time when doctors and parents are concerned about obesity and harmful eating habits among American adults and children, we need to do everything possible to make sure consumers are not turned off to one of the healthiest foods out there, spinach. Significant research has been done on protecting our meat supply from E. coli outbreaks, but very little has been done on protecting our vegetables. With more research, we can have a safe, healthy product for adults, children and Popeye to enjoy!," said Rep. Farr.

Farr's bill, the Spinach Research and Recovery Act of 2006, authorizes \$26 million for food safety research specifically dedicated to fresh produce, as well additional funds for emergency assistance to producers and handlers of fresh spinach who suffered losses when they voluntarily pulled fresh spinach from markets in reaction to the FDA's public health advisory issued in September, 2006.

The top American researchers in the fresh produce safety field are already in place at the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Center for Food Safety and Applied Nutrition within the FDA, but current funding levels are not sufficient to meet the urgent need for additional research in response to the E. coli outbreak.

"Because of the timing of the E. coli outbreak in fresh spinach, Congress was not in session to address these issues promptly. I am introducing this bill days before the end of session so that we can go into the next Congress with a legislative package ready to go. I've spent this week talking to colleagues in both the House and Senate, making them aware of the urgent public health and produce industry concerns resulting from the E. coli in spinach outbreak and am hopeful that the groundwork we're laying this week will ensure quick action in the new session," added Rep. Farr.

Following the public health advisory issued on Sept. 14, 2006, the FDA traced the E. coli outbreak to one farm and processing plant in San Juan Bautista. The FDA has lifted their advisory on all fresh spinach products dated after Oct. 1, 2006 and is compiling a final investigation report.